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TEACHER POWER: FORCE FOR PROGRESS

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"The new agreement makes New York City the most attractive City school district in the nation for teachers. It includes not only increases in salaries and fringe benefits, but also provides for a further professionalization of teachers and promotes democratic administration in the schools. It will improve the morale of our teachers, which will reflect itself in improved teaching of children in the classroom."

From a statement by the New York City Board of Education, September 3rd, 1965.

The statement of the New York City Board of Education following the conclusion of the 1965-67 collective bargaining contract is a direct testament to the growing power of teachers. The statement itself is taken somewhat out of context, for it is imbedded in a long recital of the reasons why the board was forced to agree to the contract. Those with power seldom give it up willingly, let alone gracefully. Behind the new New York City agreement stretches a long history of mass demonstrations, picketing, strikes, and protest.

What happened in New York City is now happening across the nation, in medium and smaller-sized school districts as well as in the great cities. We are in the midst of a dynamic readjustment of traditional power and status relationships in education which will probably continue for a number of years until a new equilibrium is reached.

Our Paternalistic Heritage

There is no doubt that the relationship between teachers and administration, boards of education, and society itself is in an accelerated process of evolution. Education has long been an essentially paternalistic enterprise. The school system stands in a parental relationship to the pupils, and within the staff structure, the historic relationship between teachers and administration has been paternalistic, too.

Not that teachers have found their paternalistic captivity uncomfortable. On the contrary, over the past century employees in many other enterprises have challenged the power structures governing their terms of employment, but teachers have been little involved in these broad social struggles, and they did not carry forward any strong movements of their own until the present time.

A century ago education was a popular cause; a mass movement; and yet there were very few educated teachers. The movement depended on a few crusading leaders. The paternalistic relationships were, by and large, accepted as benevolent and necessary.

There have been plenty of instances of capriciousness, injustice, and general autocratic mis-rule by superintendents and principals over the past century, and these excesses have left bruises on teachers which will be a long time healing. But given the explosive expansion of education in the United States over the same period - the creation of a massive system of elementary and secondary schools in a land where there was little formal learning - it is difficult to see how it could have been done in any other way.

The development of paternalism in education is curiously parallel to an earlier development in the American textile industry. When Queen Victoria was still in diapers, (probably trimmed with gold lace), the woolen industry was undergoing a period of expansion not unlike the expansion of American public education in Victoria's sunset years. A quick source of cheap labor was needed, and New England mill owners placed ads in the local papers calling for young ladies of good character to come to Woonsocket, Pawtucket, ^{Lawrence} or Worcester to engage in "healthful, recreational pursuits" - namely working twelve hours a day in the woolen mills. Seventy-five years later, the granddaughters of these young ladies were called upon to staff the public schools.

Victorian status relationships between men and women were transferred bodily to the school organizational scheme. With rare exceptions, the gentle art of teaching was assigned to women, while the prestigious administrating and policy-making jobs were reserved for men. Even today, all teachers tend to be thought of as feminine, like cats, and the relationship between those in school management and teachers has remained essentially paternalistic in most school districts.

The New Militant Teacher Movement

It was refreshing last summer to hear ~~at~~ at the White House Conference on Education, Sidney Marland, Superintendent of Schools in Pittsburgh, quote Gouverneur Morris' report to President Washington on Louis XVI. Dr. Marland was speaking of superintendents. The quotation he chose was,

"He is a good man, as despots go, but he inherited a revolution." Dr. Marland and the AFT seem to be in agreement. There is a revolution in progress in education.

The motive power behind the education revolution is the new teacher militancy. Some people do not like the sound of the word "militancy." They associate the term with bug-eyed revolutionary action. Yet one does not to be a bomb-thrower to be militant. Militancy is caring enough about solving a problem to do something about it without undue concern for one's personal reward. On the other hand, militancy is the stuff of which movements are made.

It is interesting to speculate as to the basic causes of the accelerating growth of teacher militancy in the two decades following World War II. Although the declining purchasing power of teachers' salaries during the fifties should not be discounted, one could not say that teachers were driven to rebellion by starvation. More important, probably, has been the general deterioration of urban society, the effects of which were felt most directly by the teachers in city schools who are in the forefront of the movement. Even more basic, however, is the fact that teachers have more and more come to feel a status deficiency.

Over several decades teaching has become more professionalized. Certification requirements have been strengthened. Primitive schoolhouses have been replaced by larger and better-equipped school plants in which the teacher is expected to perform as a part of a complicated, continuous educational

machine. Year after year teachers have talked about "professionalism" until they come to believe that they are professionals. Yet the realities of modern classroom life carry with them little of the status perquisites of doctors, lawyers, and other professionals.

Evidence to support the status-drive concept is found in the fact that the new movement is far stronger among secondary school teachers, whose status aspirations are high, than among elementary school teachers who, even when they consider themselves career teachers, have been more content with the paternal organization of the schools. Most militant of all are the junior high school teachers who have all the status aspirations of high school teachers and very few of the satisfactions.

Whatever its causes, the new militancy of teachers was episodic and formless until New York City teachers hit upon collective bargaining as their central, unifying objective.

The term "collective bargaining", while a complex concept, nevertheless has a rather precise meaning. Ever since the adoption of the original ^{National} ~~Wagner~~ Labor Relations Act in 1935 thousands of lawyers representing unions, employers, or the Labor Relations Board have been spinning out their refinements of collective bargaining theory. All the major problems and most of the minor ones too have long ago been settled. Through all of this evolutionary development the basic idea has remained uncorrupted; employees as a group have a right to bargain with management as to the terms and conditions under which they will perform their work.

Small wonder, then, that collective bargaining has become the manifesto of today's militant teachers. The collective bargaining concept has the classic

unifying force of "the idea whose time has come".

Organizational Rivalries

A movement, however, cannot be successful without organization. Furthermore, teachers especially, because they are advocates for a world of order and reason, demand organization. Thus the shift in the power relationships which is now taking place within the educational enterprise also involves changes in the traditional teacher organizational lineup. The National Education Association, with its state association satellites, has reflected the status quo and resistance to collective bargaining, while the American Federation of Teachers, long little more than a protest group with little vested interest in the status quo, has wholeheartedly embraced the "new" concept.

The organizational rivalry generated by the collective bargaining concept is a vital part of the dynamics of the present situation. Before 1960, the AFT was hardly taken seriously by the NEA-dominated Educational Establishment. AFT literature began talking about collective bargaining as early as 1955, but few AFT members, let alone non-union teachers, had any very definite notion of what the idea involved. Some AFT locals had achieved positions of power in their school districts, and some actually had written agreements based on the principle of exclusive representation by one organization. Even where AFT locals had established their viability as instruments of teacher power, however, their stance was largely defensive - ~~it~~ a sort of "don't tread on me" attitude. These scattered islands of AFT strength

offered no nationwide challenge to the associations.

When, in 1960, it became apparent that New York City teachers were likely to turn to the small but militant AFT Local 2 in their quest for leadership, the NEA was forced to sit up and take notice.

The essential nature of the NEA establishment is not clearly sensed, even by many who are in the higher levels of the organization. We in the AFT have long hurled the accusation of "administrator domination" at the NEA, but I think this attack also misses the mark. The NEA is really a gigantic corporation, operated primarily for and by its staff. Originally this was not so. Before World War I the NEA was an assemblage of superintendents, lesser administrators, and college professors.

These were the real "pros" in the rampant paternalistic educational enterprise, and they saw no need for involvement of the mass of teachers. Following World War I, however, a massive campaign to enroll classroom teachers in the organization got underway. Whether this change in policy was prompted by fear of the newly chartered AFT or whether it was prompted by a desire to increase the organization's tax base, the result was that control of the vastly enlarged enterprise passed almost completely into the hands of the staff. Since World War I there have been new NEA presidents almost every year, but there have been only four executive secretaries in all that time. NEA conventions tend to be mass conclaves of well-meaning people utterly powerless to grapple with the fundamental issues confronting the schools.

The charge of "administrator domination" has some substance, even

if it is not entirely accurate, because the staff relies on the administrators to see that NEA dues are collected from teachers, and consequently the managers of the enterprise are careful not to alienate administrators by actions or policies which would impinge on the paternalistic structure.

The meaning of the drive for collective bargaining by the New York City AFT local was not lost on the NEA staff. Neither the NEA nor the New York State Teachers Association had ever been able to establish a significant base in the New York City school system, and no serious attempt was made to change this situation prior to 1960. But when suddenly it was seen that as many as 40,000 new members would be added to AFT rolls, the staff saw its empire challenged. An NEA office was opened in New York, and staff thinkers attempted to come up with a substitute for collective bargaining which would leave status and power relationships essentially unchanged.

In spite of the ingenuity displayed in the development of the term "professional negotiations" as a substitute for collective bargaining and "sanctions" as a substitute for "strike", the drive of teachers for increased power shows no sign of abating, and its effects will continue to be felt within the traditional establishment as well as outside.

Toward a New Power Equilibrium

The victory of the AFT in New York City touched off a new wave of militancy within the AFT and outside it as well, and the new impetus has resulted in the AFT being chosen the exclusive representative of teachers in Detroit, Cleveland, and Philadelphia, and the odds favor the AFT in several

other major cities where representation elections are apt to be held before the end of the current school year.

The fact that association forces will probably win many more representation elections than the AFT will not halt the shift in power relationships within the educational structure.

The AFT will continue to win a significant number of big city elections, giving the union added financial support and establishing additional strong union power bases for future expansion. Much more important, however, is the fact that an increasing number of representation elections will be held, regardless of who wins. Inevitably a competition between contracts will develop which will compel the associations to become more and more like unions. On the other hand, there are almost no forces moving the AFT to become less militant. The collective bargaining dynamic is all the other way.

Education has embarked on a one-way highway. There is no turning back. The only question is the ultimate destination. Although it would be difficult to pin-point the exact spot ^{at} which the present movement will come to rest, it is safe to say that it lies in a region where the professional authority of teachers, as individuals and collectively, is well established; recognized by administrators and the general public alike.

The essence of professionalism is responsibility for exercising independent, expert judgment in performing one's work. The paternalistic system stands squarely in opposition to true professional status for teachers. Collective bargaining fits neatly into this situation because it provides the means for teachers to exercise their collective judgment and to establish a

much larger zone of individual professional authority.

The shape of the next equilibrium within the educational enterprise is becoming quite clear in spite of the fact that only a few real contracts have thus far been consummated. Incidentally, almost all of these contracts are AFT contracts. While the associations have hundreds of professional negotiation agreements, few of them go into matters of substance. Most are in the nature of "union security" agreements providing exclusive recognition and a machinery for "consultation" between association representatives and the school superintendent, with the board of education having the final say in case of disagreement. The few agreements embodying matters of substance negotiated by associations are in districts such as Milwaukee, Newark, and New Rochelle, where AFT locals are breathing hotly down the necks of the association leaders.

The existence of five or six genuine contracts, however, is enough to point the way to the future. It will not be too long before teachers in many districts will be negotiating maximum class sizes, staffing ratios, teaching hours, after school programs, assignment of teachers to class programs, transfers within the school system, and the assignment of teachers to non-classroom chores, if any. All of these matters have been negotiated by AFT bargaining agents and all were once considered entirely within the authority of the superintendent and the school board. In addition to the areas listed above, it will be but a short time until teachers negotiate hiring standards and innovative, experimental, and research projects involving the entire educative process.

The Basis of Power

Peculiarly enough, there is little disagreement between teachers and administrators, or between teachers and those school board members who serve

because of their interest in education rather than the tax rate, regarding objectives. Everybody wants better schools. The disagreement comes in the authority area; who will make the decisions.

At the outset of this discourse, I remarked that few people with power give it up willingly. They share their power only when they are confronted with a counter-vailing power which must be dealt with. The beginning of teacher power is teacher militancy, and its effective mechanism is collective bargaining, but there is a solid rule in negotiations that what one gains at the bargaining table is directly proportional to the power one brings to the bargaining table. Furthermore, despite the rationality of collective bargaining as a way of determining policy in school systems, no school system has even moved toward collective bargaining until the teachers have made a show of power.

"Power", like "sex", is a taboo word in most circles - but where would we be without ^{either one?} ~~it~~ Teachers, particularly, are reluctant to talk about society and government in terms of the complex of power relationships which are the realities of social dynamics. Teachers are advocates for a world of reason, where everything has a logical and rational explanation. Democracy is a system of government based on attractive patterns of circles and squares, all connected by straight lines.

Teachers have been slow learners when it comes to understanding the uses of power. Nevertheless, given the militancy, the collective bargaining mechanism, and the organization, teachers are ^{inevitably} becoming more and more sophisticated in the techniques of generating power. When the school board and the administration says "no", then what do you do? ^P In traditional labor-management relations, the most potent weapon has been the strike. ~~Teachers, however, have been reluctant to resort to the strike to gain their~~

~~ends.~~

Last May I wrote a short piece for the Saturday Review in which I maintained that the strike is the most professional and the most effective means for exerting teacher power. I should like to quote from that article so that I could add a few footnotes.

....."Where the right-and the willingness-to strike exists, most disputes will be settled without an actual walkout. Both sides then have an incentive to negotiate in good faith.

There are four alternatives to the strike, and all are much worse than a possible work stoppage. Disputes can be "settled" by: 1) continuing the status quo, 2) carrying on a cold war between teachers and school authorities, 3) political action, or 4) arbitration. The first of these alternatives, the "don't complain" philosophy, is unthinkable if we really want good education. The second, the long-festering contest of little meannesses between teachers and school authorities, erodes morale and seldom results in any real solution to the problems confronting the schools.

Political action is often far different in practice than in theory. Frequently the choice of opposing candidates offers little hope for improvement. Furthermore, politics is a two-way street; it is often hard to discover who has more control, the politician who depends on teachers for votes, or the teachers who depend on the politician for favorable action.

The final alternative, a pet panacea of the no-strike supporters, is a devastating influence on negotiations. Neither side will bargain if it knows that the dispute is going to wind up in the hands of an arbitrator.".....

Strike, Sanction, or No-Contract, No-Work?

Two problems which I did not have space to deal with in the Saturday Review article, but which must be dealt with in any discussion of teacher power, are (1) the legal problem, and (2) possible abuses of teacher power.

Many states have laws forbidding strikes by public employees, and even where no such law is on the books, most judges will grant injunctions against teacher strikes. In courts, the power resides with the employer, particularly in the case of public like school boards, which are deemed to possess sovereign powers derived from the state. This same situation prevailed in respect to labor disputes in private industry until the use of injunctions in labor disputes was severely restricted by the Norris-La Guardia Act. This law was not passed until 1932, however, after many decades of labor struggles.

Although public disapproval of strikes by teachers is probably less severe than it once was, it is doubtful that this shift in public sentiment will become strong enough in the next few years to permit enactment of an educational Norris-La Guardia Act.

Consequently, if teachers are to use the work stoppage as a tool, a way must be found to counter the legal power of the board of education.

There are cases on record where employees have been able to successfully defy a no-strike injunction, but not very many. New York City social workers in the Department of Welfare did it in January of 1965, but there were factors in that strike which are not always present in teacher

strikes. The social workers had reached a state of desperation in which many felt they would rather forfeit their jobs than continue under existing conditions. Also, the cessation of welfare payments resulting from the strike could easily have touched off a riot. Then, too, the political problems involved in suppression of the strike were too great to be faced by the city administration. Finally, the social workers received uncommonly skillful legal advice.

Except in a few very large cities, or smaller cities with strong pro-labor traditions, the out-and-out strike is not a reliable source of power, although it is useful as a protest. Almost none of the small-district strikes have gone on for more than a few days. Most of them have been more in the nature of demonstrations, and the objectives of the teachers have been limited and easy to settle. In fact, the only post-war teacher strike involving a broad range of issues was the one day strike of New York City teachers in 1962.

There are, however, forms of work stoppages which have been proved to be extremely effective. These are variations on the mass resignation theme. There is no legal way to compel anyone to work. It is certainly not illegal to resign one's job. If a group of employees resign, the employer is then forced to replace them - a difficult thing when it comes to skilled workers like teachers - or to negotiate the terms of their return to work.

Teachers in several of the Canadian provinces where the right to strike is not recognized (it is recognized in three provinces) have used this technique effectively, and there have been at least two successful mass resignation work stoppages of New York City teachers - night school teachers

in January, 1959, and summer recreation teachers in 1964.

The mass resignation technique is the basis of the NEA's sanctions policy, at least in its most developed stage, but the NEA has yet to actually use this form of sanctions. In Utah, where state-wide sanctions were recommended by the UEA, a dispensation was granted prior to the opening of the school year. Later, during the school year, a two-day "recess" was called, but teachers did not resign. The Utah "recess" was a demonstration of power, however, which undoubtedly influenced the state legislature in its deliberations on state aid.

It is worth noting that teacher militancy in Utah has expressed itself primarily at the state level, and was strongly supported by superintendents and principals. Local organizations have not been able to take such a belligerent stance, since such action would impinge on the power of the superintendent. Furthermore, there appears to be no contemplation of developing anything like collective bargaining on the local level.

In Oklahoma, the sanctions process appears to have been an empty threat. Inviting Oklahoma teachers to leave the state probably did nothing to accelerate the sizable migration of teachers westward which has been going on for a number of years. The sanctions were lifted this fall for no readily apparent reason. In the meantime, various actions by the governor, the legislature, and the voters in a tax referendum have eased the financial situation, but there has been no increase in teacher power in the state.

Probably the best solution for the work stoppage problem, however, is a "no-contract, no work" policy. Shortly after the signing of the first New York City contract, the United Federation of Teachers adopted the following resolution:

"Henceforth New York City teachers will render their services only under the terms and conditions of a collective bargaining contract. "

What this meant was that since the contract would expire June 30th, the following year, teachers would not begin teaching in the fall if no new contract had been negotiated. The policy did not stipulate the form the work stoppage would take, but the leadership of the local tried to induce the union membership to follow the mass resignation technique. However, in spite of their strenuous efforts the union decided to follow the simpler strike procedure. Two new teacher agreements have been negotiated since that time, one in 1963, and a new one beginning in 1965. There have been no strikes, but the deadline has acted as a spur in negotiations, and in each case the "final" offers of the Board of Education in June have been considerably improved by the time September has rolled around.

It is likely that, as contracts are negotiated in other districts represented by AFT locals, the no-contract, no-work principle will be extended. In larger cities it is likely that the no-work part of the policy will be implemented by the strike, but in smaller districts probably the mass resignations will be used.

There are sources of teachers' power other than the ability to refuse to work when conditions are less than professional. These included public relations, research, and the support of affiliated organizations. These tools will not be neglected as teachers continue their progress toward greater status, but they must be considered as auxiliary aids rather than major sources of support.

Conclusion

I wish to conclude by attempting to allay some fears which non-teachers may have about the growing power of teachers. Unfortunately, from my point of view, I think that those on the other side of the bargaining table see the potentialities of teacher power much more clearly than most teachers do, at

this writing. Nevertheless, even though progress may not come as fast as some of us would like, it is certainly coming.

I said at the outset of this discussion that the change in power and status relationships within education would continue until a new equilibrium is reached. Until the last two decades almost all power has resided in the board of education and the administrators^{from}. The new equilibrium will involve a sharing of power and a consequent greater professionalization of teachers from which all will benefit; students and the general public as well as those who make education a career.

When teachers wage a successful fight for smaller classes, everyone benefits. When staffing ratios are improved, everyone in education can do a more professional job. When teachers' salaries are raised, school boards and administrators can be more selective in their employment policies.

If there is anything to be feared in the new militant teacher movement it is that the struggle for greater power may generate such hostility toward those who oppose the movement that teachers may become excessively defensive and rigid in their attitude toward innovation and experimentation. In some other professions and in some unions a "what's good for them must be bad for us" philosophy has developed. The group involved considers itself in a perpetual state of seige ^{by} ~~against~~ the rest of society, and this has resulted in a great loss in productivity and service.

Not that the old educational establishment has been a generator of social progress. On the contrary, as Dr. Conant has observed, the old educational establishment found itself unable to cope with the demands of modern society. The 1965 White House Conference was an "over the top" effort to break away from the restrictions of the establishment, just as the new teacher movement represents a similar effort at the grass roots level.

School board members and administrators can help prevent a new period of stultification in educational policy by granting teachers a seat at the bargaining table. What happens after that will depend upon the give and take of negotiations. Out of the sharing of ideas, and the mutual respect on which the new relationship must be based, can come a new era of educational progress.